



RATCLIFF COUNSELING

Specializing in Self-Leadership and Trauma

Internal Family Systems – An Overview

An Eclectic Integration of Multiplicity, Systems Thinking, and Attachment Theory

Brandt Ratcliff, LPC

IFS Therapist, EMDR Therapist, TBRI Practitioner
Specializing in Self-Leadership and Trauma



“The past is never dead...

...it isn't even past.”

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*



Attachment
Theory

Systems
Thinking

Multiplicity

Internal Family
Systems Therapy

History of Multiplicity

- ↳ 2200 BCE – first recorded instance of multiplicity
- ↳ The Old and New Testament and religious texts
- ↳ Multiplicity is pathologized in Dark Ages
- ↳ David Hume, Enlightenment proposed multiplicity (rational vs. emotional)
- ↳ MPD first diagnosed in 1784 and multiplicity is pathologized. Again.
- ↳ Late 1800s Pierre Janet offered multiplicity as result of trauma/Durand de Gros proposed multiplicity as the natural and normal human experience
- ↳ Historic and Contemporary psychology supporting multiplicity

Attachment





Systems Thinking

Systems function in the same way no matter the level of the system.

Intrapsychic, Family, Society/Culture, ecosystem, etc... - all reorganize with change to achieve homeostasis

Polarizations, alliances, triangulations, exiled members - you name it! They all exist intrapsychically, too.

When Trauma or trauma Occurs

- ↓ Protective parts of the system powerfully protect the part of the system that experienced the adverse effects of the trauma
 - ↪ a playful part is exiled to protect the client from a harsh parent – protective parts such as studiousness, ambition, quiet managers get stronger to protect the client from the harsh parent and these protective parts 'take over' for the client to prevent further hurt
 - ↪ A hurt child (now holding the belief they are worthless) is exiled to protect the client from sexual abuse – protective parts such as dissociation, self-harm, critical voice, anxiety emerge to protect the client from further abuse
- ↓ The exiled part gets 'stuck' developmentally and chronologically. Usually, neither the traumatized part (the exile) nor the protective parts realize the passage of time therefore continue thinking throughout adulthood that they need to continue to protect the child
- ↓ Protective parts continue
 - ↪ to change personality in avoidance of similar triggers (proactive)
 - ↪ in reaction to triggers in order to distract or dull the exile's pain (reactive)

PROTECTORS

M
A
N
A
G
E
R
S



Mama Bear



Connector



Chocoholic



Avoider

F
I
R
E
F
I
G
H
T
E
R
S



Lookout
Tower



Logistics
Coordinator



Inner Critic



My Self



Stupid



Shame



Little Anna



Fraud



Worthless

VULNERABLE EXILES

Multiplicity in IFS

↓ Protectors

- ↪ Managers - proactive - "Never Again!" (example)
- ↪ Firefighters - reactive - "Not Again?!" (example)

↓ Exiles

- ↪ Where the trauma lies
- ↪ Young, vulnerable parts exiled due to ACE/harsh parenting
- ↪ (example)

Common Managers: people pleaser, organizer, perfectionist, worrier, passive, avoider

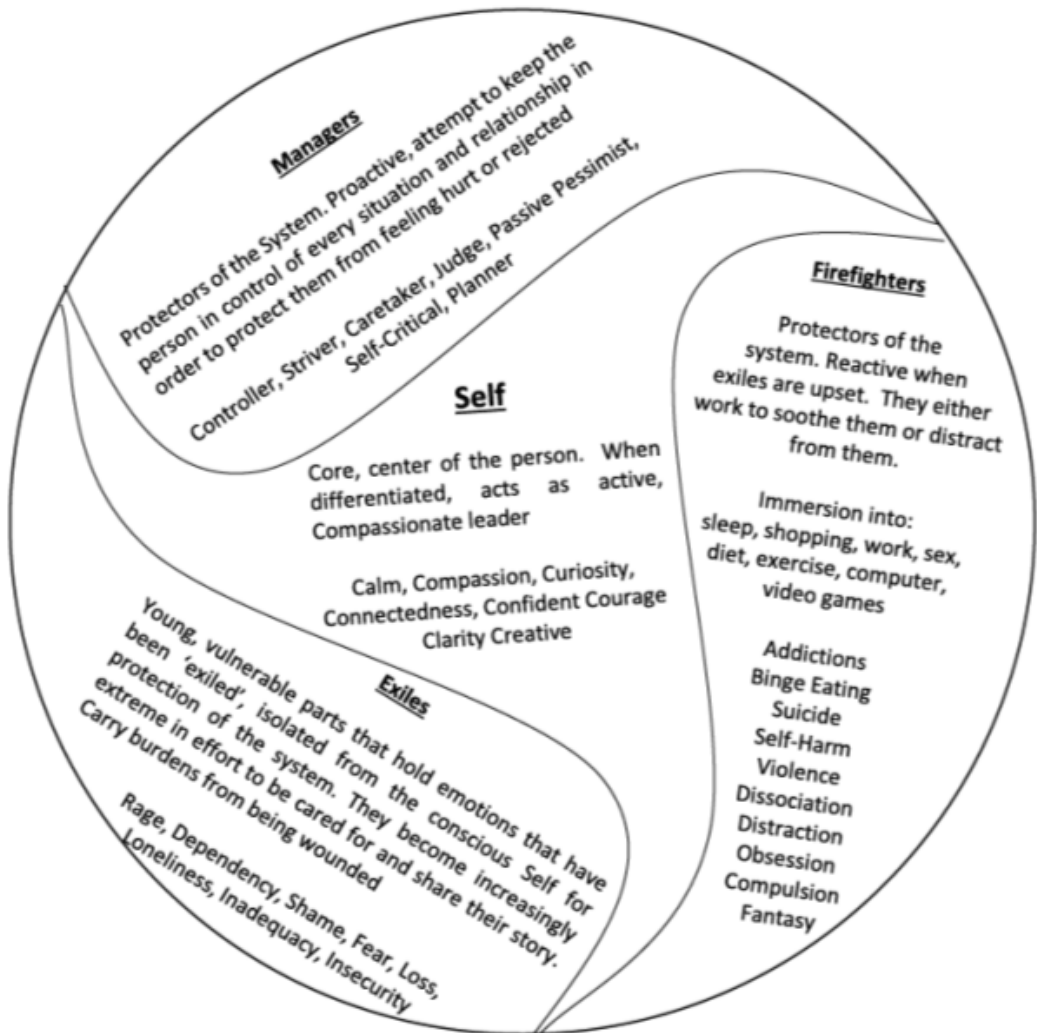
Common Firefighters: anger/rage, shopping, sex, gambling, drugs, alcohol, dissociate

Common Exiles: lonely, fearful, worthless, failure, hurt boy/girl, not good enough

The Self in Self-Leadership

- ↳ Seat of consciousness - core, healing resource
- ↳ Present in everyone - no matter the symptomology or history
- ↳ Not a part
- ↳ 8 Cs of Self-Leadership (a litmus test)
 - ↳ Compassion, Clarity, Calm, Curious, Creative, Connection, Courageous, Confident
- ↳ 5 Ps (additional attributes of Self qualities)
 - ↳ Playfulness, Patience, Presence, Perspective, and Persistence
- ↳ Therapeutic application of Self
 - ↳ The client (the Self) has everything it needs to heal the system and bring balance/harmony

Frequent assessing of Self qualities throughout the session is essential.





Assumptions

It is the nature of the mind to be subdivided into an indeterminate number of subpersonalities or parts.

Everyone has a Self, and the Self can and should lead the individual's internal system.

The non-extreme intention of each part is something positive for the individual. There are no "bad" parts. All parts are welcome.

As we develop, our parts develop and form a complex system of interactions among themselves.

Changes in the internal system will affect changes in the external system and vice versa.



Goals of IFS Therapy

To achieve balance and harmony within the internal system

To differentiate and elevate the Self so it can be an effective leader in the system

When the Self is in the lead, the parts will provide input to the Self but will respect the leadership and ultimate decision making of the Self.

All parts will exist and lend talents that reflect their non-extreme intentions.

IFS vs. Traditional Therapy

Client presents with anxiety problems.

Traditional Models:

IFS:

- ↓ Befriend the anxiety becoming curious about why it works this way
- ↓ Find out what the anxious part is afraid of for the client if it doesn't do this job
- ↓ Find the part holding the pain/hurt/etc...
- ↓ Unburden the part by bringing it into the present and providing truth

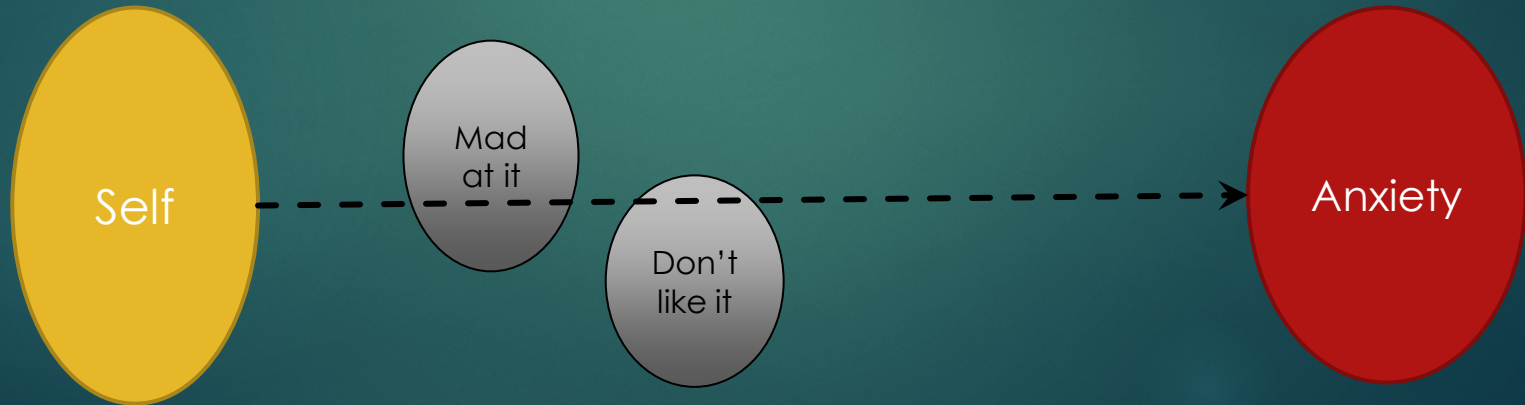
The “work” of IFS Therapy

Gentle, respectful posture with parts

Differentiation/Blended and Unblended parts

Goal is to facilitate the relationship between the client's Self and the client's parts.
Establishing the client's Self as leader of the system.

The therapist is actually co-therapist for the client's Self. The client's Self is therapist for the client's parts.



Case Study

Tim witnessed his father being killed in a car accident at age 4. It was then the pain of the loss (pain of the loss and a belief that he could die at any second) was exiled into a 4 year old. As an adult, Tim experiences constant worry about death that prompts OCD behaviors. When he forgets to complete one of his OCD rituals, he harshly judges himself and takes a strong muscle relaxer to zone out.

- ↓ Why does Tim seek therapy services?
- ↓ What are the managing parts of Tim?
- ↓ What are the firefighter parts of Tim?
- ↓ What are the protector's intentions?
- ↓ What can be identified as the exiled part?
- ↓ When performing therapy with Tim, what parts would you target?

Case Study

Veronica was sexually molested from age 3 to 8 by an uncle. As a teenager, she daily researches suicidal themes including ideation, effects on surviving suicide, how family responds, etc.... After therapy appointments she flies into rage and swearing at her mom or dad, whoever drove that day to the appointment. When she calms, she berates herself for being out of control and apologizes by baking treats and writing sweet notes to her parents.

- ↓ Why does Veronica seek therapy services?
- ↓ What are the managing parts of Veronica?
- ↓ What are the firefighter parts of Veronica?
- ↓ What are the protector's intentions?
- ↓ What can be identified as the exiled part?
- ↓ When performing therapy with Veronica, what parts would you target?